

NEIL KRAHE

"Rose and Michael" began with the idea to portray urban society of today. In earlier series such as "Coathangers on Strike" and "Lover in the Closet", I took events from society and illustrated them. In "Rose and Michael" I took the events of a year and a half of my life, hence the more personal images.

I have offered no alternative to the society in which I live, I offered only a fleeting glimpse, a small molecule of a section of society in which I live. There are no answers to the problems of the world, so long as there are people there will be problems. There is no such thing as democracy, there is no such thing as communism, there are only human faults and emotional issues. There is no such thing as right or wrong. If there is then the etchings have no say either way. What I tried to achieve was a visual representation of past and present values, there are no rules, no meaningful answers. What right have I to say that society is right or wrong with the very symbols of that society? A political poster shows a bias towards the artist's ideals but is that good art? A product is publicised on television, does that make the product good?

The etchings started in the middle of an endless tunnel and finished where there was no end. There are no statements, the work is a visual representation of thought, the endless tunnel. Each etching was produced and influenced by the thought of that moment. One day a news bulletin, the next an old lady crossing the street, inspiration for thought, if an etching took two weeks to complete then it contained the inspiration of that two weeks.

If a person sat continually in a bare room there is still thought.
Thought cannot be suppressed.

"To me the world is neither this nor that but all things at once
and to each according to his visions." On Turning Eighty, Henry
Miller.

ROSE AND MICHAEL

Rising up every morning just in time for breakfast, a shower or a wash. One time it used to be an hours wait but then there was training. Bare bread slightly burnt on both sides washed down with a cup of tea. Michael's mother called it "toast", Christ called it "his body", Michael called it "in the beginning".

The houses have no setting sounds. The trees have borne fruit to feed many generations. Rows of metal mail boxes stand erect as in some military roll call. It's early Sunday morning and the fog begins to lift. A paper boy rides into a block, distinguished only by a name, to bring news of yesterday. He places papers in selected boxes, for they have paid their dues. Three houses down the old lady waits as she has done in the past. The boy greets her cautiously, for stories at school call her a witch. The old lady's family wishes to place her in a retirement village but she will not leave her only home. Exchange of money plus a pension-allowed tip gives the boy and society reason to accept her.

Pushing hard on the risen pedal achieves momentum for a little further on a small fox terrier awaits in ambush.

Michael sits at breakfast gazing out the kitchen window. His paper still folded neatly beside the sugar and untouched coffee. He had inherited the house when his mother had died of cancer, the cancer which was waiting for him to grow old. Through the window lies the garden in which seeds lay dormant waiting for the

right season. Beyond the garden grows "Rose", a willow tree swaying in the breeze, flickering shadows onto the back neighbours' fences. The growl of the fox terrier followed by the cry of the paper boy put Sunday in perspective.

Five hundred and forty-five steps to the bus stop. Michael waits. Four minutes and thirty-six five.... four seconds till the "Action Bus" arrives. Dressed in his van dyke suit, necktie adjusted for the right amount of ventilation, the morning paper under the left arm. In his right hand an umbrella poises uncomfortably as a precautionary measure. Upon the bus, Michael breezes through the paper as if he was reviving his memory of all the morals he had learnt at home and school.

ONE DEAD IN CRASH

On Sunday morning at nine o'clock, a father of two died on Wood Wood Street after colliding with a lorry. The lorry driver....

"Speed Kills?"

WAR IN MIDDLE EAST

Rebel forces raided a hotel....

"Make Love Not War?"

MAN SENTENCED TO DEATH

Thomas Felix today was convicted of murder of his wife and two children....

"Thou Shalt Not Kill?"

FACTORY WASTE POLLUTES RIVER

DEATH NOTICES

Mr S Jones, father
of Mr T Jones of
Samuel Cres.,
Ainslie, died on
Tuesday of cancer.
Frn at Weet CC 9.00
"Smoking Caused Cancer?"

Michael flows out of the bus tumbling his hands over one another to adjust to the outside atmosphere. Steps forward into a sea of collared shirts, neckties and permanent pressed trousers which recede like a tide into the Central Business District.

On Wednesday Michael did not go to work, instead he returned to his childhood and ventured among all those familiar places. Sections of his early years left behind because society told him to be mature. He returned to the chicken coop where he fell and scarred his tongue, down the side of the garage where now spiders shelter to catch their prey, under the grape vine which is wild from neglect, and he returned to Rose's branches, now drooping under their own weight. Though Michael could not clearly remember the thoughts of yester-year he knew then that he belonged. He dislikes his cold lifestyle of being an adult. Now under the weight of Rose's branches, life was a grey haze, leaving the continual hum of his working life. Like a blurred photograph Michael was seen but personal characteristics could not be distinguished. The grey haze engulfed Michael and turned him once more to the thoughts he could not remember.

It was in a dream that Michael decided to marry Rose. He would marry and build a house around her. After earning the honest wage he would return and be surrounded in tranquility by his piece of captured past. He would have all the comforts of the mechanised world with the escape to nature right in his own home. The haze thickened and from it came Nytho.

Nytho had been Rose's friend from the time that Michael had entered his adult life. As Michael was creating his dream house around Rose, Nytho was pulling it down with equal efficiency. Through Michael's eyes Nytho appeared in the image of a seal and from his introduction, Nytho indulged in the telling of stories and adventures in which he had partaken.

"Picture a healthy middle aged man" started Nytho, "married and with two children."

Michael did not find this hard because his neighbour, Mr Parker, was middle aged, married and had two boys, Joseph and Leon.

"One day," Nytho continued after a pause to see if Michael was paying attention, "this man cut the insides of his mouth upon which he began to chew..... He started to chew and distort his mouth to achieve the best possible bite. Aching in the mouth, relaxation was found by biting on the ends of his tongue. He continued to bite his nails and nibble on the ends of his fingers. At times he would deliberately cut himself and feed off the healing scabs. Naturally this repulsed the wife and the children were not happy because they were not allowed to suck their thumbs.

As time went on machinery noises from the garage resulted in the removal of his foot. Shortly after he had to cut off his other foot to restore equilibrium. As the need continued, his legs began to get shorter. Once he passed his waist his wife left him and applied for a divorce, and custody of the children. (Maybe she thought that they were next on the menu.) This did not deter the man who by now had his fingers turned into buds and his nose and ears were missing.

Doctors from all over the world rose to his need and created all types of devices to keep him alive. They pleaded with him to stop eating himself, for life is sacred and the body is a temple of God. This did not stop him. He started to chew on his arms and torso."

Nytho coughed and picked his teeth for a short while before continuing, "When I saw him last he was nothing but a mouth chewing on his insides. Then two days later I heard he had died. It was some technical problem, about the wires that kept him alive got tangled around his tongue. He was confirmed dead by choking."

Strange, thought Michael, he saw Mr Parker's wife leave last week and he had not seen him since he was working in the garage.

When the terror had died down some of Michael remembered - or thought they remembered - the sacred years of his childhood. The world had changed in one day. Now it was Thou shalt not steal.... without need, or Thou shalt not kill.... without cause,

or Thou shalt not commit adultery unless.... Michael's mind ran over several possibilities and settled for them all.

Sitting comfortably by his cup of coffee and swimming his spoon till the liquid rose to the lip, Michael pondered over his Murray Cod. It had been his first meal in two days. It took hours of preparation and patience to catch a fish. Up early in the morning and out getting bait. Walking for miles, following a river, to find a suitable fallen branch or rotting trunk to collect wood grubs; hindered by blackberry bushes and stinging nettles on the journey to and from; hindered by funnel webs and centipedes as you invade their homes and their food supply. After labouring for hours there was the return home to prepare the fishing lines. Once ready, you would take on the elements and travel to find a suitable river in which to fish, only to wait patiently for the prey to take the lure.

Michael could see his brother pulling a fish in with ease. He had been fishing for three hours, the wait was not worth it. The fish swung its tail in one last defiant act to find its freedom in the murky waters below. It was rare to have "one on" this early. The fisherman put the escape down to bad luck, rebaited the line and continued to check the fifty other lines set along the river. At certain places he remembers times when he caught edible fish; by that oak tree the line was a tangled mess, something big had taken it and broke off. Around this bend a thirty pound female was pulled in, he recalls the fight she gave him.

Once in the channel the fisherman notices a branch of the wattle bending towards the river, the line tied to it is tense, disappearing straight into the deep waters. All the signs show that something has taken the bait; the fisherman quickens his pace. Upon arrival a small tug on the line suggests a snag, another slight pull produces movement in the waters below. Knowing that his catch has wrapped itself around a log or other flood debris, the fisherman prepares for a swim. He removes his shoes and socks, shirt and jeans, avoids the stinging nettles and tests the water. It's the middle of summer and the top of the water is warm, but the holes run deep and an icy chill grips as he steps into the water. Using the line as a guide he follows it down to where his prey is trapped, unwraps the line and returns to the surface for air. He knew now that his fish had turned into a turtle. (he could feel its shape under the water). He returns to the bank and retrieves his disappointment which is quickly exterminated, turtles have become pests in these rivers. He does not check the rest of the lines, instead the fisherman returns to his favourite spot and lights a fire to dry-out and drive away the mosquitoes. The sun is setting.

The air is vacant just on twilight, it's a moment of peace. Then nature lets out a sigh creating voices through the tops of pines and welcoming the end of another day. The breeze from the pines fuels the fire taking ash and smoke across the river. Though refreshing after a hot day, the breeze is not strong enough to keep the mosquitoes away. The stronger ones penetrate the smoke and clothing, even the chemical repellent is not successful to a line of the immune. The fisherman ventures from the fire to

check some of the closer lines but is forced back by a counter-attack, a victory to the mosquitoes. At camp there appears to be a break in the neglected defences as the fisherman rises from a patch of stinging nettles. Now the voices of the pines are joined by a chorus of night life. It is time for the fisherman to return for his daily dose of society, a society which creates dependants. The fishing lines will be left till morning as a reminder. The fisherman recalls the past, there were times when he was walking to the car with several fish hanging from a branch over his shoulder. Tonight, nature had won, he would leave it to fight amongst itself. Like a diabetic sufferer, he collected his bag and the mosquitoes carried him back to suburbia.

Fishing down the coast Michael recalled that even he was able to make a catch. It happened on the second bridge over the same river. The water was still salty though it had rained all that week. The luderick began biting on the turn of the tide. The mosquitoes started biting before the sun appeared. On the second fish a seal whipped across the water creating ripples of terror, in Michael. From that moment not another fish was caught. Thinking about it reminded Michael of Nytho. He blamed Nytho for his terror, and for the fact that he never caught a fish since.

Looking down he noticed that his meal of fish had been eaten. Not remembering in partaking the meal he blamed Nytho for his loss. He turned his eyes to Rose and strained his ears as the voices blew through her branches.

By the morning things were back to normal, Michael lifted his body from his bed, leaving reminders of how he had slept. Automatically he dressed for work and prepared a breakfast which he did not eat. He left his house, failing to notice that his decorative birds were decaying. Grabbed a carrot and a banana cake from the health shop and counted four hundred steps to the bus stop. Michael did not notice that the bus was running on the Saturday Timetable. The only thought which passed his mind was once again he would be working. At least at work he could numb his mind to the reality of the outside world. By the time he reached the office door, noticing that it was locked, he realised that it must be Saturday.

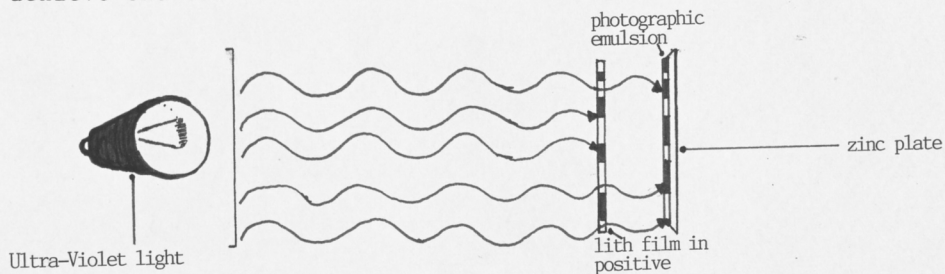
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PHOTOGRAPHIC ETCHING (Summary)

The process of all the work is mainly based around photographic etching. This process is the transfer of a photographic image, through the means of lith film, to an emulsified metal plate. (The plates used in this series are zinc.) The lith film is contact printed and exposed onto plates with an Ultra-Violet light. The lith film is in the positive form, exposure was for Bmin on a 1200V machine. The zinc plate, after exposure, is developed in a Mitziche developer at the temperature at 37°C . Anything higher than 40°C can result in overdeveloping, anything lower than 35°C results in underdeveloping. Both of these errors results in loss of detail. The developer removes emulsion which was not exposed to the Ultra-Violet light, the emulsion exposed is hardened through chemical change.

Where the emulsion has been removed lies naked plate which is ready for etching. The areas of emulsion on the plate are still sensitive to scratches so care must be taken.

Areas of naked plate which are quite large can be aquatinted to achieve the desirable black.



The emulsion is removed by the use of Methylated Spirits.

Techniques

The first half of the series was derived from 35mm negatives. Various photographs were taken from around Canberra, in some cases a studio setting. The negatives were placed in an enlarger, increased to desirable size and exposed directly onto the lith film. This produced a positive image. For my 35mm shots I used Ilford FP4 or HP5, black and white film, developed usually in 1D-11. The lith film used is Kodalith and developed in the A and B stocks.

Most of the early images were aquatinted heavily, producing extreme darks. Slowly, throughout the series the darks diminish and lighter and clearer images appear.

The next development was the progression into photo-collage. The images were exposed onto lith film and then cut out and placed on the plate or the images were blocked out and two different exposures were used. The juxtaposition of these images gave the surreal effect. The final section of work was the development into drawing. The obvious way of doing this was using soft ground, hard ground and dry point. These techniques were used in the beginning. Then the next development was the use of a piece of cleared lith film which was dry pointed with a sharp implement. The lith film was then used as an etching plate and inked up and wiped over with a rag. This gave a positive image on the film base. The image was then exposed onto a photosensitive plate. The last of the images were drawn onto paper with

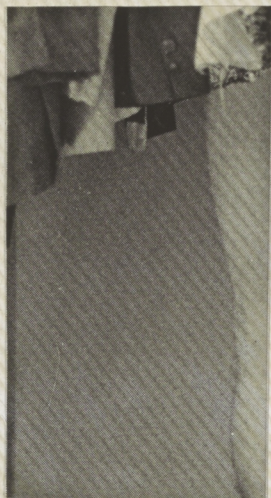
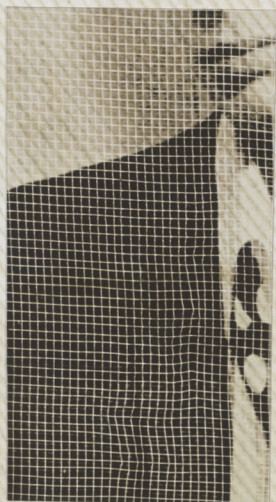
4B and 2B pencils and either photographed onto a 35mm negative and exposed through the copy-proof machine, giving a negative and then contact printed to a positive and exposed onto the etching plate. Other processes used through the series were Sandwicked Images, Montage, Multipul printing, Solarization, Mixed Media and Emulsion manipulations.

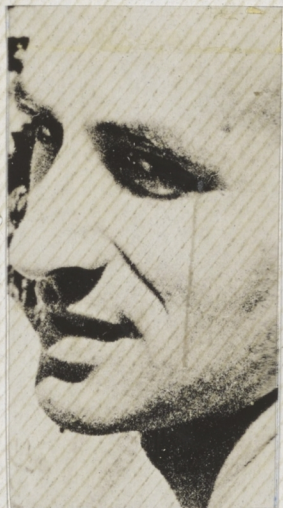
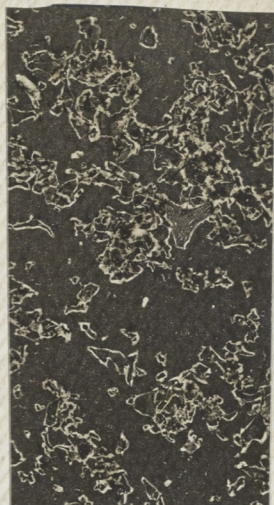
The use of colour in the series was applied by using separate colour plates, stencils or roll ups.

Screens

The series began with the use of mechanical screens, various sizes in dot screens and mezzotint screen. The next step was the use of different gauzes and fly mesh. I used various types of tissue paper (contact printed through the 35mm negative) and muslin (and other cloth). The experiments in photographic emulsion gave way to the use of gelatin as a screen by using various dyes to clear gelatins. The dyed gelatin gave the effect of a coarse aquatint.

The final uses of screens was in the use of glass. From any glass shop there are textured glasses which give various screens through light refraction. The type I found most successful was non-glare glass. This glass (screen) gave the effect similar to a fine aquatint, picking up very fine details of the negatives used.









Colour

The use of colour in the series was applied by using separate colour plates, stencils and roll ups. Fine sand paper was used for the stencils, which was rolled up with separate colours and printed on the inked-up plate. In the roll ups the colour was printed on natural objects such as willow leaves and bark, also being placed straight on the ink.

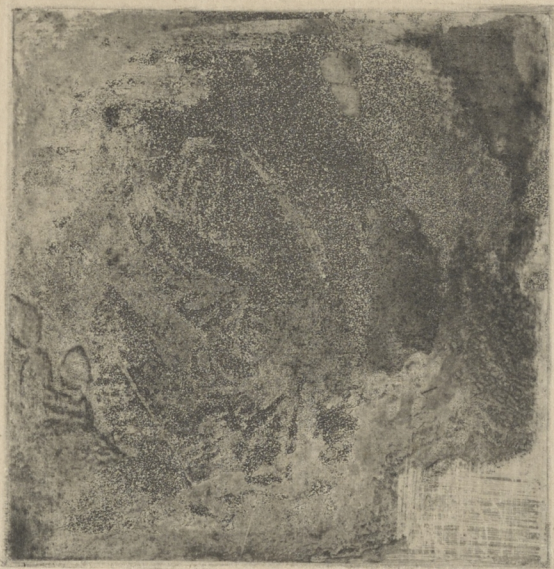
Photographic emulsion on etching plates

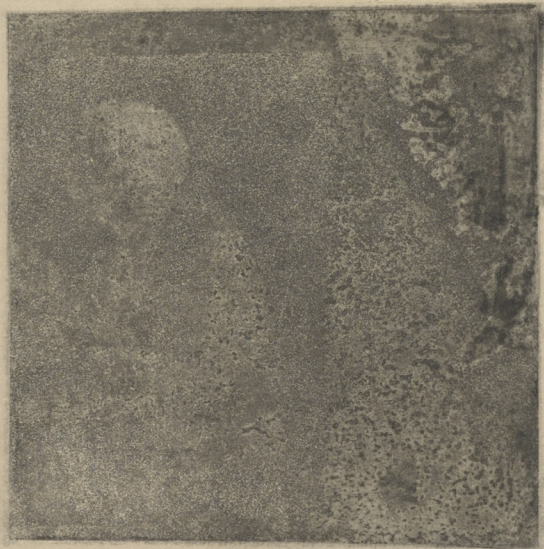
This method of photographic etching has not been successfully completed. The results of the experiments produced interesting and exciting images, but the method of producing these images has not been controlled. Below is a brief summary of the technique used to produce these images.

1. Preparation of plate.

Zinc plates were used for all the experiments. From the manufacturer the plates are smooth and have no grip for the emulsion. To produce adequate grip the plate was treated in several ways.

1. placing it into acid bath
2. sanding
3. rubbing with charcoal
4. aquatinting
5. rubbing with steel wool









The Emulsion

The emulsion was used in a variety of different chemical mixtures. The chemicals used were; potassium dichromate, gelatin and gum arabic. The first step was to prepare the gelatin at a temperature of 43-44°C (gelatin is used as a base and gripping agent), and allowed to soak for twenty minutes. Next a solution of potassium dichromate is prepared at saturation form. The gum arabic also is prepared at saturation form. These three solutions are mixed together keeping the temperature above 40°C but not over 55°C. This solution is then added to the prepared plate and left to dry for about four hours or until it is dry to touch. The potassium dichromate solution should be mixed under a safe light and dried in the dark.

Exposure

The exposure is achieved through contact printing a negative image. The emulsion is sensitive to ultra-violet rays and can be exposed in the sun, under fluorescent lines or with ultra-violet lamp. The time of the exposure depends on the strength of the light; for the sun twenty to thirty minutes on a good day; fluorescent lights fifteen minutes; ultra-violet lamp five minutes. The longer the exposure to light source the harder the emulsion becomes.

Development

The plates are developed in warm water at a temperature not above 55°C, the water is changed every 15 minutes for one to two hours.

The acid resistant coating

The developed plate now has a coating of gelatin on the exposed areas and naked plate on the unexposed areas. The next step is to treat the plate with an acid resistant coating. For this I used bitumen and rolled it onto the plate. This method is similar to the lithographic roll up. The bitumen is thinned with turps and thickened with talc. The bitumen will adhere to the naked plate. Finally the emulsion is removed in a hot water bath. The plate is ready for etching.

Problems

With this technique the main problem was control over the experiments, in drying a flat surface was not available, the instruments were not available such as accurate thermometer beakers etc. The advantages of the process are that it is cheap, no chemical developer is needed, the artist can place a photographic image onto a worked plate.

Photographic Emulsion on Paper

These experiments were also not a total success. Though images were produced, the control over the process was not sufficient. Though not successful, the experiment gave me a better understanding of the photographic process. In the experiment two methods were used, one with the potassium dichromate solution and one with a silver nitrate solution.

Potassium dichromate emulsion

This emulsion is based on the same process as the zinc plate emulsion. First the gelatin base is prepared at 43°C - 44°C . The potassium dichromate solution is prepared at near saturation. The two solutions are mixed together and a coloured gouache is added. This is placed onto the paper and dried. The image is then contact printed onto the paper with the use of an ultra-violet light. Developing takes place in a tub of warm water. This is changed ever 15 to 20 minutes for one hour.

Silver nitrate emulsion

Solution A. combine 25grams of silver nitrate with 200ml of distilled water (under safe lights).

Solution B. 5grams of gelatin dissolved in 190mls of distilled water, left to swell.

Solution C. 15grams of potassium dichromate added to gelatin after swollen.

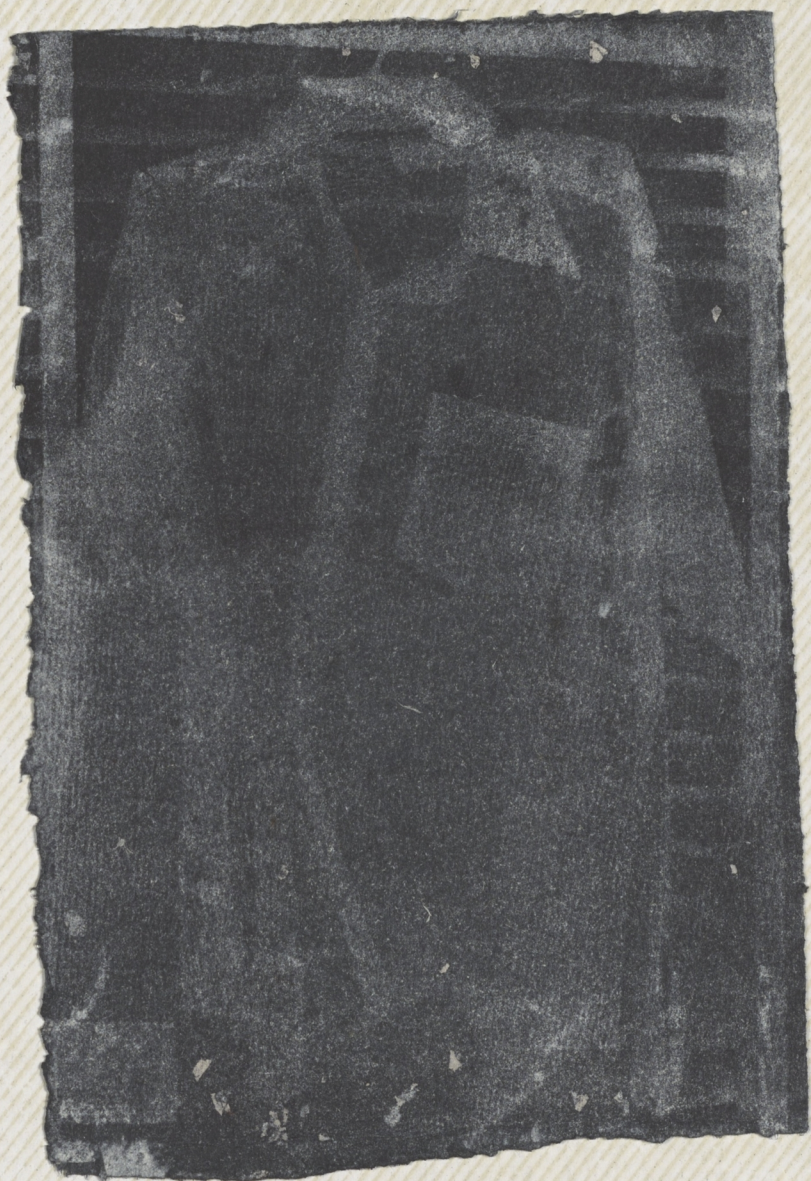
Raise temperature to 50 - 53°C maintain while adding the silver nitrate solution slowly. Stir constantly and maintain temperature



1 Coos
2 Wide below 1 inch more 1/2 1/2
3



for 10 minutes. Warm gelatin to 43-44°C and mix in the silver nitrate solution and potassium dichromate. Allow the emulsion to cool and gell. Place the emulsion into a piece of clean cheese cloth and immerse into cold water, twisting the cloth tightly around the gelatin and squeezing it through the fabric. Strain the noodles in a sack of two or three layers of cloth (no iron should come in contact with the emulsion). Wash noodles with cold water allowing them to sit for three minutes, repeat five times. This eliminates unbonded salts. Strain the remaining noodles and heat them in a water bath to 50-53°C. Maintain temperature for 15 minutes and cool it to about 40°C. Then coat emulsion onto prepared paper. This emulsion is sensitive to blue light and is very fast.



Layout of Prints

1. Breakfast

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| (a) Sliced Toast | photographs from |
| (b) Manufactured Michael | 35mm negatives |
| (c) Sliced Toaster | |

2. Michael

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| (a) Public Servant | photographic |
| (b) Nature (an eco-system) | etching from 35mm |
| (c) Captured | negatives, photo- |
| (d) Public Servant Utopia | graphic collage |
| (e) Denial | drawing on plates, |
| (f) Creation of God | soft ground. |

3. Meeting

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| (a) Rejection | photographic collage |
| (b) Boiling Point | drawing on lith |
| (c) Acceptance | film |

4. Marriage

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| (a) Christ | photographic collage |
| (b) Marriage | stencils |
| (c) Michael's return | |

5. Adventures of Nytho

- (a) Chess (life) game drawing on plate
(b) The Black Forest drawing on lith
(c) In Death film.

6. Fisherman

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| (a) Patience | photographic |
| (b) Memories | etching from |
| (c) Lunch I | 35mm negatives |
| (d) Lunch II | drawing onto |
| (e) Nytho's Lie | plates |
| (f) Persistence | |

7. Suburbia

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| (a) Hydro | photo collage |
| (b) Electrical | silkscreen on |
| (c) Power | plate |

8. Dinner

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| (a) Industrial Evolution | |
| (b) Future Hall | |
| (c) Technicological Revolution | photo drawing |